



The Church of Scotland

Church and Society Council

Briefing:

A Connected Scotland – the Scottish Government’s Strategy for Tackling Social Isolation and Loneliness

28 January 2019

The Church of Scotland welcomes the publication of the Scottish Government’s ‘Connected Scotland: A Strategy to Tackle Social Isolation and Loneliness’ and looks forward to the work that will be taken forward as a result of this.

Evidence gathered by the Church of Scotland in its submission to the Government consultation demonstrates the ongoing impact of work carried out in local congregations daily.¹ The Church’s Annual Statistical Return states that more than 73% of congregations who completed their return were engaged in community development work, including work around health and wellbeing.

Therefore the Church values the direction the Scottish Government is taking in the development of this strategy and appreciates the recognition of the exceptional work being carried out by congregations and their community partners across the country.

Isolation is a significant issue within Scotland’s rural communities. Congregations that serve these communities provide access to valuable assets such as volunteers, buildings that provide a resource for the wider community often in areas where there is limited or no public provision, and transport where there are few local transport links.

An example of a church meeting the needs of the community would be Springburn Parish Church in Glasgow and the establishment of ‘Musical Memories’ – a weekly singing session for people with dementia and their carers.² Family carers are at real risk of becoming isolated, and a further outcome of Musical Memories is that carers are able to connect with people who are going through or have gone through the same challenges as them – creating a valuable support network.

St Boswell’s Parish Church in the Borders has started ‘Café Thursday’ during the school holidays. The church provides a space where young and old can meet together, where those with childcare responsibilities can mix with others doing the same, and where folk living on their own who would like some company can connect with others in the community. The space is agenda-free and bustles with the noise of play, chat and clinking china.

In Ayr, a Pioneer Ministry has been established where Rev Chris Blackshaw provides pastoral support to the farming community, providing pastoral and emotional support where

¹ <http://www.scpo.scot/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/A-Connected-Scotland-response.pdf>

² <https://bit.ly/2COWJlu>

needed. In many instances his help is sought by people with no direct church connection but who are aware that Chris is on hand to offer a friendly ear and support.³

Isolation and loneliness can often be associated as experiences had by older people in our community but the reality is that it affects all ages. Transition points in life can have a profound impact on young people, particularly when traditional support mechanisms are not as effective or are missing. Changes in family circumstance, change of home or school, bullying, coping with gender identity or body image, poverty, or the loss of family members can all be triggers that result in young people feeling isolated.

Projects such as Lochside Mission in North Ayr provide a mentoring system for vulnerable young people within the immediate neighbourhood, and use a converted single deck bus to reach outlying areas.⁴

CrossReach, the social care department of the Church of Scotland, use the Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) wellbeing indicators (SHANARRI) to promote the concept of 'wellbeing' in children and young people.

Staff who work in projects for children and families use the wellbeing indicators in their discussions and capture progress as outcomes improve. CrossReach believe that more community groups should use this approach and have created "Calamari Shanarri" - an octopus displaying the indicators on each of its eight legs - for play and discussion. Examples of the octopus have been knitted across Scotland and used by church groups, Brownies and childminders as a way to help people talk about when they feel lonely and / or in need of support.

These are only a few examples of how the Church and its partners are engaged in combating isolation and loneliness in Scotland. Across the country, local churches are engaged and connected to the wider community. As an existing resource of experience and networking, the Church is a key partner in the local community working with others to effect change.

However, while we recognise the contribution being made by local faith communities and the third sector, more can always be done to improve community connectedness and cohesion.

We also recognise that there are areas of the strategy that are the responsibility of Government both nationally and at a local level. In particular we are concerned about transport links in rural communities and in outlying housing areas in urban areas, and are concerned about the growth in new housing developments that have no meaningful community facilities such as meeting spaces, shops and public transport created to support them. Lack of such amenities means we are creating new communities with isolation built in. Everyone has a part to play to tackle social isolation and loneliness and build a more connected Scotland.

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http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/news_and_events/news/2018/kirk_appoints_first_ever_dedicated_farming_minister

⁴ <http://lochsidemission.org.uk/>